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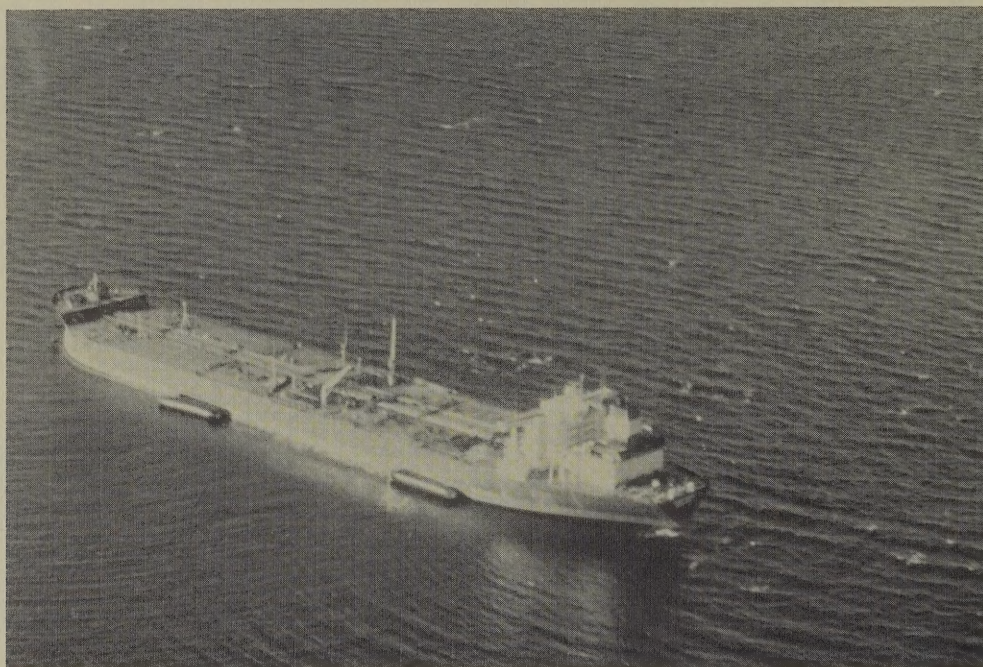
Oil Spill Mires Alaskans

BLM contributes people, supplies, expertise



Emergencies force people to become creative. To save time, workers tried dropping a boom out of a helicopter. It had never been done before, but they figured it was worth a try. After the boom was on the water, fishing boats pulled several booms into position to prevent the oil from moving into the bay. The procedure was so successful it was repeated the next day.

BLM pitches in to help fight spill with people, organization, supplies



Supertanker Exxon Valdez lies aground in the calm, clear waters of Prince William Sound. Within two weeks of the spill, about 60 BLM employees were working full time on the disaster.

by David F. Vickery

When the supertanker Exxon Valdez quietly slid onto the rocks of Bligh Reef in the calm waters of Alaska's Prince William Sound early the morning of March 24, the chain of events spread faster than the oil slick itself.

BLM, like so many other government agencies, was caught up in responding to the disaster, and faced a sudden, major demand on people and resources.

Nearly 10 million gallons of Prudhoe Bay crude oil that had flowed the 800 miles down the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and then gone into the belly of the tanker, gushed from the rup-

tured hull into the clear waters.

BLM's Pipeline Monitoring staff, because it is charged with monitoring the environmental condition of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor, immediately reviewed oil spill contingency equipment and supplies in place along the pipeline. They requested that the Alyeska Pipeline Company immediately replace any materials such as chemicals and absorbent materials that had been used for the initial spill response. Alyeska Pipeline Company complied with the request and replaced all contingency material by March 31.

Meanwhile, working under the guidance of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Environmental Project Review (OEPR), BLM established close coordination with other

Interior Department agencies and began taking an active role in dealing with the disaster.

One of the first things BLM did was send Ken Hunt and Mike Menge of the office of pipeline monitoring and Teresa McPherson, of the public affairs office, to help handle questions and requests at the OEPR in Anchorage. Public affairs specialist Rob McWhorter went to Valdez, where he spent two weeks helping to answer questions and requests in the regional response team center.

The environmental project review office, headed by Paul Gates, represents the Interior Department on the Regional Response Team, which is controlling and coordinating all federal responses to the disaster. (This team is the Alaskan arm of a nationwide

organization that deals with the management and containment of oil spills.) Others besides the Interior Department who serve on the regional team are the departments of Transportation (Coast Guard), Defense, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Energy, Agriculture (Forest Service), Labor, and Justice, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the state of Alaska.

By Tuesday, March 28, BLM had contacted Coast Guard and Exxon officials, and responded to a request to mobilize fire crews and equipment for cleanup. A Type 1 Interagency Incident Command Team was called out under the direction of Dave Liebersbach of BLM's Alaska Fire Service. This is a management team assembled from people employed in a variety of jobs at different agencies. They are specially trained in the Interagency Incident Management System to handle emergency situations, typically wild fires, but occasionally for such things as earthquakes or volcano eruptions. A type 1 team is the most experienced; there are only 18 such highly trained and experienced teams in the nation. Last summer Liebersbach's team managed firefighting operations at the Storm Creek fire near Yellowstone National Park. Liebersbach cut short a meeting in Reno, Nevada, returned to Alaska and went to Valdez.

There was some local opposition to using fire crews for the cleanup work, however, and by March 29, Exxon and state of Alaska officials decided not to use the fire crews immediately, but did want to be able to call on BLM for logistical support.

It became apparent that the spreading oil slick, which was causing heavy damage to both the wildlife and lands of Prince William Sound, would likely move toward the Gulf of Alaska and might hit the Kenai Peninsula shoreline, including the Kenai Fjords National Park.

The National Park Service requested that BLM set up the incident command team in Seward to help assess the area's biological and physical resources and prepare

Fifty to 60 BLM employees were working full time on the disaster, not counting those who worked as volunteers or for other agencies such as the Civil Air Patrol.

protective measures, such as booming off critical bays.

At Seward, Liebersbach and the team established a multi-agency coordination group that included state agencies, the Kenai Borough, the City of Seward, the National Park Service, the Chugach National Forest, the Fish and Wildlife Service, Chugach Alaska Corporation, the Northern Pacific Fisheries Association and BLM.

One of Liebersbach's jobs was to find out where the marine wildlife and sea birds are concentrated, then set priorities for containing the deadly oil.

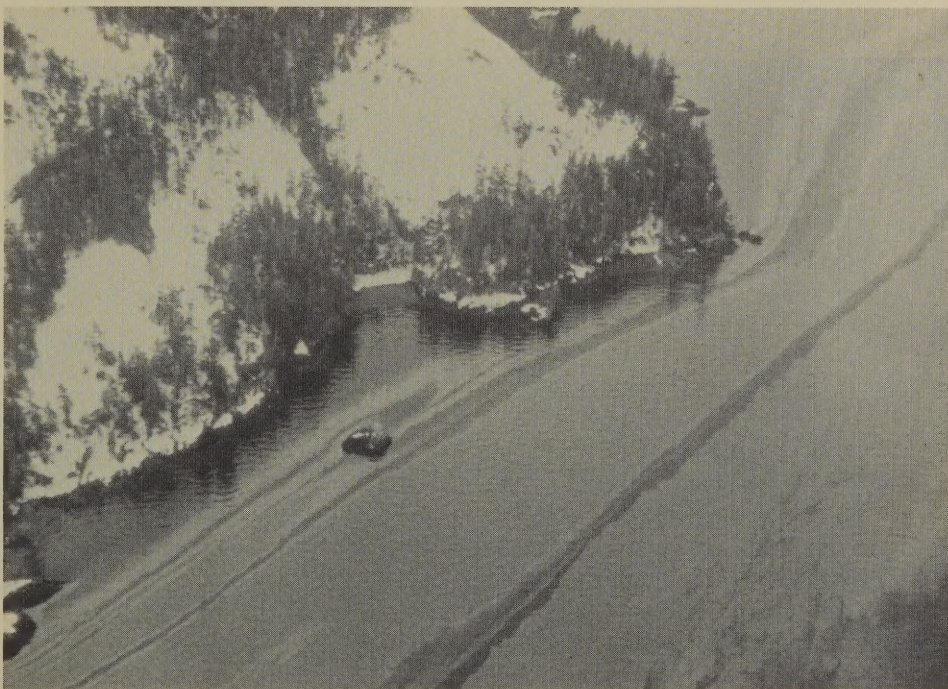
The Kenai Fjords park is big—660,000 acres—with more than 600

miles of shoreline on the northeastern edge of the Kenai Peninsula. It contains huge bird rookeries and is home to a tremendous number of marine mammals, including sea otters, seals, sea lions and whales. Important salmon spawning streams are also part of the critical habitat of the park.

Once the team was in place and working, plans of action were developed, boats were hired and biologists and other scientists were dispatched to the remote areas.

Nearly the full resources of BLM's Alaska Fire Service were put into play. The fire service, headquartered in Fairbanks, arranged logistical support for the Seward operation. A 24-hour command headquarters was established in Fairbanks, and everything from ground and air transportation to information officers was supplied. The Boise Interagency Fire Center was also called on for supplies and equipment. Boise sent a video crew to Alaska to document resource conditions for the Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Kenai borough and to

continued on page 6



Six days after the massive spill, strings of oil drift against one of the small islands in Price William Sound.

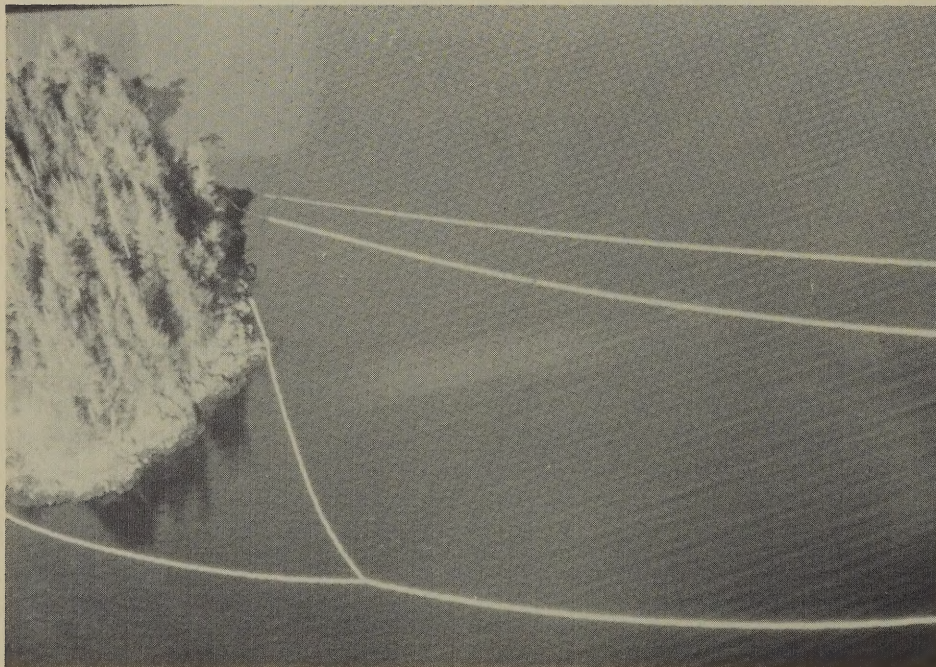
Dateline Valdez— on the front line of a disaster

Public Affairs specialist Rob McWhorter had just moved from Montana to Alaska when he was thrust into the thick of the nation's biggest news story.

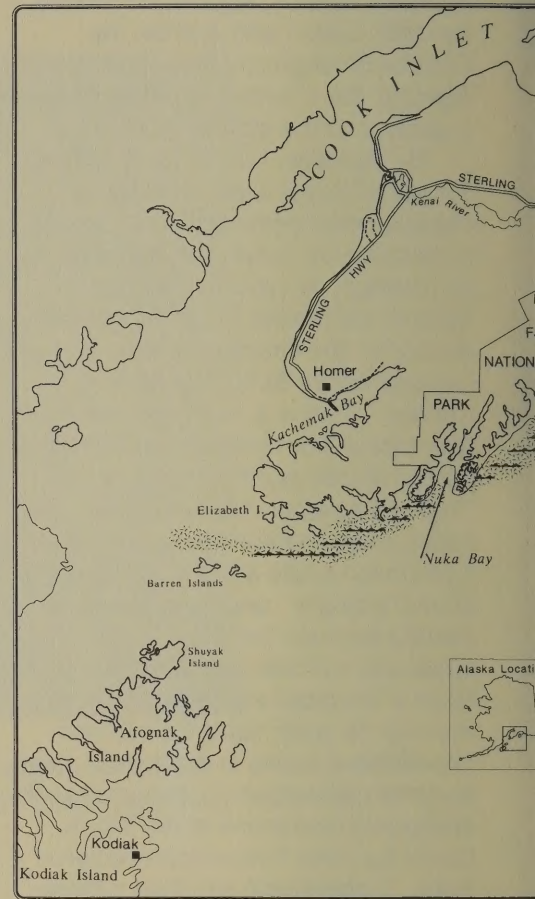
by Rob McWhorter

As we walked in the door at Coast Guard headquarters (Marine Safety Office, Valdez), the Secretary of Transportation, Mr. Skinner, the Director of EPA, Mr. Reilly, and the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Yost, were all leaving the building. There wasn't a grin in sight, but there were a large number of cameras recording these gentlemen's exit. I thought to myself, "this is not your garden variety emergency situation. This one is going to be different."

My assignment was simple; do whatever the Department of Interior's representative on site, Ms. Pam Bergmann, needed to have done. The next eleven days and nights were to become a blur of activity involving many, many meetings in stuffy rooms, telephone inquiries, xeroxing, telefaxing and miscellaneous errands. The goal of all this was to establish and maintain an information flow from



The oil was moving south, so several booms of oil-absorbent material were stretched across Sawmill Bay to protect the fish hatchery.



Valdez sufficient to assist BLM and Departmental officials in making decisions in the emerging oil spill battle.

The first thing you have to learn in dealing with oil spills in water is the terminology. Oil is "ropy, mousse-like, fingered, thick, thin, heavy sheen, light sheen, transparent sheen, colored sheen, pancake, tar-ball, or broken" depending on the circumstance. In the equipment area, you've got twenty-plus kinds of booms, at least that many types of skimmers, a whole range of boats and ships involved, safety gear such as the orange survival suit called a "mustang", and aircraft ranging from a small helicopter to the Air Force's giant C5-A.



Our assigned work space was a twelve-by-twenty foot room we shared with eight Coast Guard public affairs officers and petty officers. This group was the Coast Guard's "first string, major league" public information team who, combined, had nearly one hundred years of oil spill experience under their belts. This information "boiler room" had four telephones, and was the focal point for the 200 -300 reporters and photographers who were covering the spill.

Watching the Coast Guardsmen was a real education. I was deeply impressed by the calm, deliberate, business-like manner in which these men and women operated, particularly bearing in mind that the white-hot

focus of the world media was constantly at hand, prodding and prying. Camera crews and reporters from CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN, NOVA, Jacques Cousteau, Germany, Japan, France, England, Canada, AP, UPI, Reuters, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Boston Globe, and many others were represented. Everyone spoke English, but a lot of thick accents made clear communications that much more difficult.

On top of the actual management of the oil spill crisis, hardly a day went by without one or more VIP's dropping in for briefings and a personal review of the situation. For the most part, preparations for these visits were low key and efficiently handled by Admiral Nelson's flag lieutenant, Lt. Ryerson, a woman of great poise and knowledge of protocol.

Walking along the streets of Valdez during a rare moment of lull, you can feel the increased tempo of action by the way people accelerate from stop signs, by the pace of their walking, by the quick nod of recognition as they spot your BLM uniform. There is also

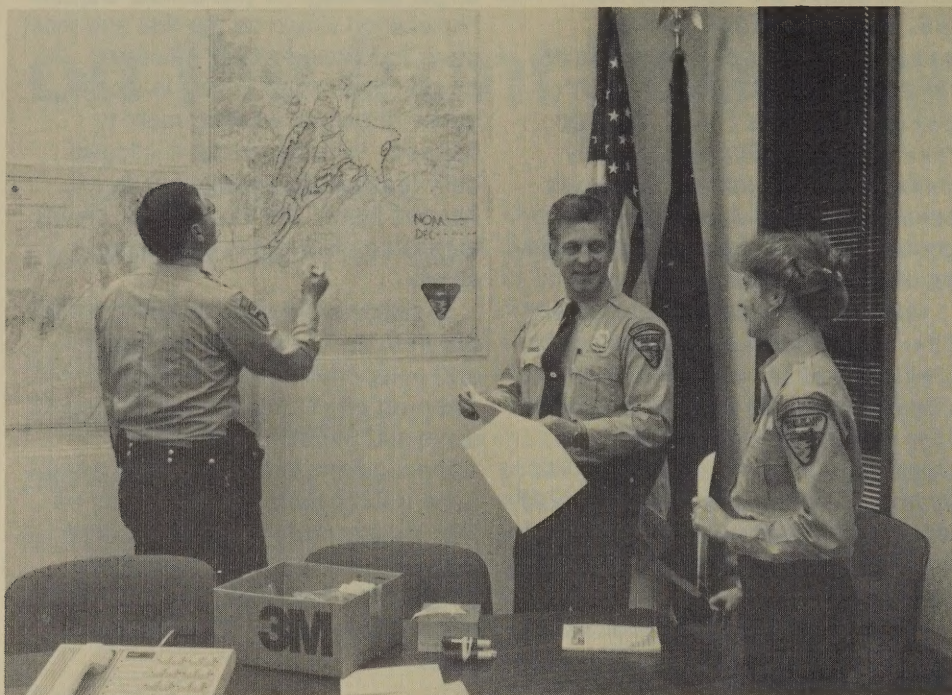
a sense of suppressed but smoldering anger, not aimed at any particular target (although, if you asked, Captain Hazelwood would be the first and most often mentioned villain, followed closely by Exxon). There is also a sense of people wanting more to happen. Whether or not it is logistically feasible for more things to happen faster, the local feeling clearly is that the clean-up is moving too slowly.

As this article goes to press, we in the BLM are continuing our logistics and personnel support role in the clean-up effort. We too are looking for ways and means of helping out without getting in the way. It is going to be a long, hard and dirty clean-up job. As stewards of the public land resource, we feel more than a little obligated to help make the impacted areas whole again. It's going to take time.



An amphibious Beaver ferried scientists, emergency equipment, and supplies to islands. Here a group of state officials, cannery employees and Civil Air Patrol people have landed at an island 90 miles south of Valdez.

BLM pitches in (continued from page 3)



BLM rangers Bob Posey and Randy Tracy and editorial assistant Teresa McPherson helped handle the hectic action at the Interior Department's OEPR.

record the way an incident command team was used in an oil spill.

In Seward, after the environmental assessment and priority setting were done, the incident command team was able to obtain oil containment booms and put crews in place protecting some of the vital areas of the park.

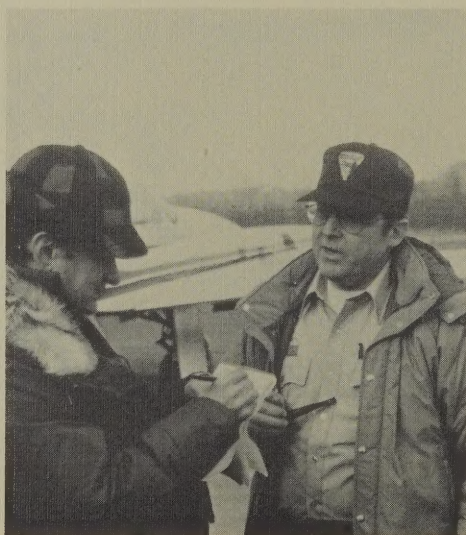
At this point, the spill covered about 1,500 square miles of Prince William Sound and was spreading into the Gulf of Alaska. Oil was reported at the mouth of Resurrection Bay, about 8 miles out of Seward, and at Barwell Island.

During the second full week of the response, the Alaska Department of Emergency Services requested BLM's assistance. A Type II (regional rather than national) incident command team under Don Abbott was dispatched to Valdez, and set up operations next door to the bird and sea otter cleaning station. This team supplied everything from fuel bladders to maps in support of the state's response operations.

Besides providing a wide variety of logistical needs, team members had to deal with an army of local and

national reporters and camera crews. Coordination through the regional response team was necessary, and by the second week of the spill response, the U.S. Coast Guard was in overall control of operations out of Seward, as well as in Valdez.

As the huge effort gained momen-



A Chicago reporter interviews BLM's public affairs chief Dave Vickery.

tum, almost all federal agencies became involved in one way or another. The Interior Department's Office of Aircraft Services provided around-the-clock support for aircraft to transport people and equipment.

At the request of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, BLM provided and set up four remote weather stations around Prince William Sound and on the Kenai Peninsula.

By April 8, wind and currents had pushed the oil into Resurrection Bay, Harris Bay and Aialik Bay in the park. Rugged Island and the Chiswell Islands, part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, were also impacted. There was a chance the oil might move into lower Cook Inlet and Kachemak Bay. By this time the slick was scattered over 2,600 square miles of ocean. Additional boom was arriving in Seward and Coast Guard cutters were sent there.

To deal with the threat of oil moving into Cook Inlet, the incident command team set up two subordinate offices, one in Kenai and one in Homer. As in Seward, they assessed resources and identified vital areas. Plans were made to boom off the bays with fish hatcheries or important salmon spawning streams.

The resources of Interior Department agencies have been thinly stretched, but as this goes to press, indications are that the emergency is diminishing.

The most positive note has been the cooperation and support shown between Interior Department agencies, as well as other government agencies.

Yellowstone experience helps leader organize oil cleanup

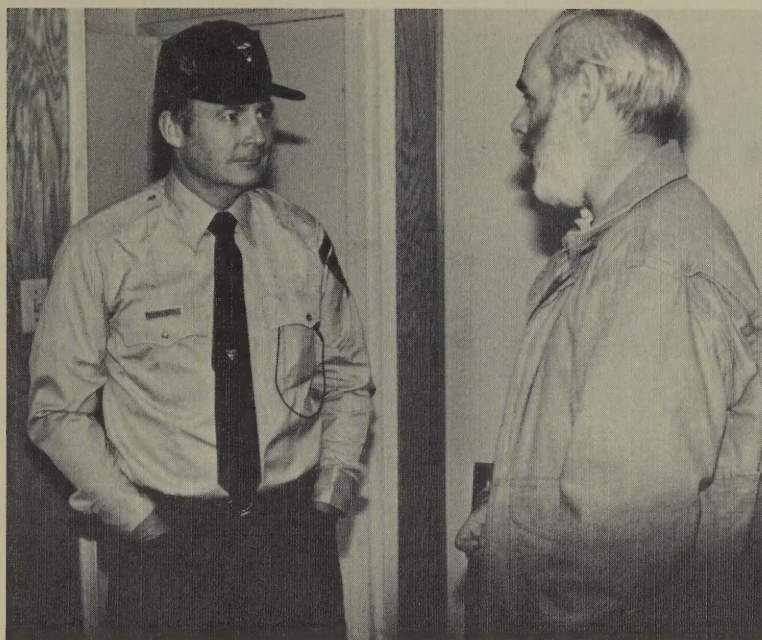
Dave Liebersbach was the leader of the incident command team in Seward. In a telephone interview with *Frontiers*, Liebersbach said, "We definitely have experienced a man-caused disaster of national proportions in a pristine environment pretty well untouched by man."

He reported that many, many birds and animals have been killed, and the migrations are just beginning.

"People have made a very real effort, but it's like a hurricane: there's only so much you can do."

Liebersbach believes the incident management system worked very well at Seward because it "offers an opportunity to improve our ability to make a maximum effort as rapidly as we can."

It wasn't the size of the operation he ran at Seward that created stress for him, but the political pressures. "On the oil spill I've had 100 people maximum working for me," he said, "whereas on the Yellowstone fire I had as many as 2,000." It was the political aspects that were stressful. "The



Dave Liebersbach, right, briefs BLM State Director Mike Penfold on oil spill developments.

whole Montana experience did not equal the stress of one day here. I've had to brief people at every level from city and borough mayors up to Interior Department Alaska regional directors, Coast Guard commanders and Senator Stevens. I also encountered the Governor's staff, the Secretary of Transportation and Senator Murkowski. So it's not the number of people, but working in a medium I didn't know much about that was so stressful."

"I did see some real positive things—people pulling together to set

priorities. They formed a multi-agency coordination group at the local level, and pulled together city, borough, state and federal agencies and Exxon to develop daily objectives and priorities. There were limited capabilities, both of people and of equipment, as you always have in an emergency. But they were able to get together and prioritize to do the greatest good for all concerned.

"I thought it was excellent that people would do that. It speaks well of the local relationships."

—JM

Seward honors Incident Command Team

April 18, 1989, was proclaimed Incident Command Team Appreciation Day by Harry Giesler, the mayor of Seward. The mayor and city officials held a ceremony at the command center that morning and awarded plaques with the seal of the city to the command team. The city also invited the team members to come back and visit Seward with their families any time, promising a warm reception.

The appreciation day was to honor the team that had organized logistics and supplies for the oil spill

recovery efforts. The team's training and experience had enabled them to create a smoothly run operation that worked well with local residents. Liebersbach said, "This was a community that pulled together to face the emergency. It worked because they have worked together on other projects. They were an All-American City twice in the past. Our team provided a lot, but we also had a lot to build on."

—SDW



frontier flashes

About 140 people turned out in Juneau recently at an EIS scoping meeting. The EIS is being prepared on Echo Bay Exploration's project to rework the **AJ mine**, and the company has applied for a right-of-way across federal and state lands to access the inactive mine. BLM has determined an EIS should be prepared on the effects of developing the mine and associated facilities on federal, state and private lands in the city and borough of Juneau. For more information call 800-478-1236, or in Anchorage 271-4409.

After being inundated by a high tide of questions, BLM's Alaska Resources Library has produced a **bibliography on the oil spill**. Entitled, "Oil Spill Bibliography: Kenai Peninsula—Cook Inlet," it lists books about petroleum biodegradation and the biology of the coastal areas the spill has touched as it moves out of Prince William Sound. It is available, while supplies last, at

supplies last, at the library in the Anchorage Federal Building, 222 W. 7th Ave. For information call 271-5205.

Outgoing Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Burford has applauded President Bush's nomination of **Cy Jamison** to become the 11th director of the BLM. Jamison is a former Bureau employee and a native of Montana. Burford said, "I've developed a great sense of trust in Cy's commitment to the difficult task of managing the nation's public lands for a variety of uses." The BLM oversees the administration of approximately 272 million acres of federal public lands, primarily in the west. About 30 percent of those lands are in Alaska.

BLM has extended the comment period for scoping on the Southcentral Resource Management Plan. The period has been extended until the end of May, to allow enough time for people involved with the oil spill to comment.

Hot off the press is a new BLM **recreation** publication, the *Delta National Wild, Scenic and Recreational River*. It contains a map of the river and discusses access, the character of various segments of the river, hazards and travel tips. Copies are available from the Glennallen District Office, Box 147, Glennallen AK 99588.

Bureau of Land Management



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